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ABSTRACT

The Talents Unlimited (TU) critical and creative thinking skills model is designed to help teachers recognize and nurture the multiple talents of all children. Research based on the work of Calvin Taylor, has identified high-level talent areas of productive thinking, communication, forecasting, decision making, and planning, in which all excel to varying degrees. Teachers can use these practical talents to help students acquire and apply knowledge across all content areas while developing skill in the use of the thought processes themselves. The TU approach fits well with other educational innovations. In TU classrooms, teachers encourage the development of thinking skills in all students within the regular curriculum. TU teachers are trained to be 'talent scouts' and to discard stereotypes to see a new repertoire of behaviors that exemplify varied intelligences. The quality of student products from a TU classroom is elevated, often demonstrating outstanding potential. Examples are given of the use of TU training in several school districts, including Fort Worth (Texas), Nash-Rocky Mount (North Carolina), and Owensboro (Kentucky). The experiences of several educators with the TU program are highlighted. (SLD)

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ED 411 380

THE TALENTS DOVETAIL: INITIATIVE FOR IDENTIFYING GIFTED AND TALENTED MINORITY STUDENTS

dovetail: to fit skillfully to form a whole

The Talents Unlimited critical and creative thinking skills model is designed to help teachers recognize and nurture the multiple talents of all children. Based on the work of Dr. Calvin Taylor, Talents research has identified high level talent areas (Productive Thinking, Communication, Forecasting, Decision Making, and Planning) in which all excel to varying degrees. Teachers can utilize these practical talent areas to help students acquire and apply knowledge across all content areas while developing skill in the use of the thought processes themselves. This success opens a window for greater teacher appreciation of student potential while enhancing student confidence in his/her possibilities for success.

"The identification of special populations students has been and is still a major concern of many educators. Fort Worth Independent School District is an urban school district with 68 elementary schools with rapidly growing populations of African American and Hispanic students. In response to the District's goals to identify and serve gifted students in all populations, numerous instructional strategies, teaching models and assessment materials were reviewed.

Talents Unlimited was one of the components added to the curriculum in the District. It met the following criteria:

User friendly

- Teachers could implement it immediately.

Affected student performance

- Neither ethnicity, language, nor socioeconomic status were barriers.
- Students were able to demonstrate their thinking and learning ability in more than one mode.

Tool for identification

- The response of students to various activities could be used as viable information when screening students to receive gifted programming services.

Talents Unlimited is the thinking model introduced to all elementary schools. The effect of using this model was most notable when the students who had participated in Talents Unlimited passed the Science TAAS test the first year."

- Sheila Turner, Elementary Specialist - Gifted Education; Fort Worth, TX

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"A recurring problem in the efforts to identify students with special gifts and talents is that ***they very often have little opportunity to display giftedness and talent***! The need, particularly at the primary grades, to focus on 'basics' often leaves little time in most classrooms for little more than what is essentially lower level thinking. Therefore, when teachers set out to determine which students should be referred to a program for the gifted, they can easily see those with good experiential backgrounds and linguistic skills but may often overlook students with gifts and talents in the things that are also important: Talents Unlimited talents.

In my position with the Department of Public Instruction, I often train groups of teachers after school in Talents Unlimited and also include it in my graduate courses in gifted education. In most cases, we meet for an afternoon. Then, teachers go back to the classroom to 'try out' one or more Talents lessons which we have developed in class, beginning with a lesson in Productive Thinking. Almost always, their reactions to the initial lessons at our next class are those of genuine amazement! Children whom they had perceived as 'slow', usually those who were economically disadvantaged, minority, and/or had other special needs, somehow distinguished themselves among others in the class for outstanding performance! Every training session brings out yet another group of teachers who see their low income/achieving students in a new, positive light.

Probably the most memorable story about this was from a teacher, Joan Warner, who teaches at a school for students with severe orthopedic disabilities. Trying to develop a lesson for these students was challenging initially because they largely focus on job training skills. However, Joan thought of a clever and useful Productive Thinking "recycling" activity whose results almost brought us all to tears. Her students are all severely involved and the group she was working with had to use sound boards and story boards to communicate. Therefore, the rapid-fire style often associated with a Talents session was absent. Joan picked a real problem for them, related to a very large part of their school day - shredding paper for the school district and the county. The group of four boys, all minority teenagers, were presented with the following problem: Think of many, varied, and unusual uses of the paper we shred. As expected, many obvious responses came first, but eventually Robert came up with an idea of a disposable mop! What an idea! Joan could not contain her enthusiasm when she came to class the next week. Robert, whom she dearly loved but had serious doubts about, had displayed thought processes which she had never thought possible! And, as she reported, Robert was pretty amazed too!"

- Dr. Peggy Dee, G/T Programs Supervisor; Department of Public Instruction; Dover, DE

"In 1977 Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm introduced legislation to include funding for gifted and talented minority and culturally different children within the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Davis & Rimm, 1989). In a keynote address to the National Forum on Minority and Culturally Disadvantaged Gifted and Talented, Chisholm (1978) lamented the failure of our educational institutions to nurture the talents of gifted disadvantaged students, faulting American education for inadequate methods for recognizing talent among culturally different children and insufficient funding to provide special programs for these children. Despite the considerable amount of literature available regarding effective identification practices for white middle-class students, few models or systems have provided systematic identification practices for gifted and talented Black students. An examination of the relevant literature since 1924 revealed that of 4,109 articles found on the gifted and talented, less than two percent (75) addressed minority group members (Ford & Harris, 1990), and this percentage

decreased significantly when one counted only those articles about gifted and talented African American students. Considerable documentation has supported the inappropriateness of traditional intelligence tests as a means for identifying these youth (Baldwin, 1977; Frazier, 1989; Hilliard, 1976; Torrance, 1971) and these researchers have suggested alternate measures for identifying the talents of the Black child. In addition, data published in the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights has indicated that minority groups (Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans) are under-represented in 30-70 percent of the gifted programs nationally and over-represented by between 40 and 50 percent in special education programs (Richert, 1987).

The purpose of programs for gifted children must be to look diligently for children whose abilities and talents can be developed with appropriate support services. Some of these students will be identified on standardized measurement devices, but efforts should also include multiple assessment procedures, including objective and subjective data from a variety of sources. Establishing case study profiles, in which a variety of assessment data are interpreted in the context of a students' individual characteristics, can be conducted by a team of qualified individuals. To improve the ability of teachers and other observers to identify giftedness in all cultural groups, specific behavioral indicators of giftedness should be provided on checklists or nomination forms. Certainly, Talents Unlimited could be used as one of the strategies for obtaining these data from classroom teachers. The Talents Criterion Referenced Tests can be used to construct a student's profile of strengths and assist a committee in identifying alternative forms of talent expression. It must be noted, however, that when alternative assessment procedures are employed, a program should use available data to create opportunities for the students to capitalize on these behaviors. For example, if we find out that a student demonstrates outstanding decision making behaviors and a program focuses on rapid mathematical acceleration, we have created a system of recognizing talent and yet provided little opportunity for this talent to manifest itself. Thus, the identification procedures should be consistent with the definition of giftedness and the curriculum provided for the students."

- Dr. Jann H. Leppien, Associate Professor of Elementary Education; University of Great Falls; Great Falls, MT

"The changing viewpoints on the nature of intelligence have made it necessary for educators to consider new identification and placements procedures for programs for gifted students. No longer can we look only at 'schoolhouse' giftedness through test scores. Multiple criteria must be considered in order to discover gifted behaviors in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor.

Current definitions of giftedness often include children who show *potential* for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment. This focus on inclusion, rather than exclusion of students, has brought special attention to the different ways in which children from different cultures manifest gifted behaviors. The Talents Unlimited (TU) program provides one of the most useful tools for discovering, identifying, and nurturing strengths and potential in diverse populations.

In Talents classrooms, teachers encourage the development of thinking skills in all students within the regular curriculum. TU teachers are trained to become 'talent scouts' and begin to see their students through new eyes, discarding stereotypes and recognizing a repertoire of behaviors that exemplify varied intelligences. The quality of products from all students in a Talents classroom is elevated, often demonstrating outstanding potential which deserves to be nurtured through

differentiated services in gifted programs.

In the Nash-Rocky Mount Schools in North Carolina, the district supports the development of potential as a critical part of programming for gifted students. Each school has one specialist in gifted education. Those specialists coordinate various services options for gifted students, in addition to providing a variety of enrichment opportunities designed to nurture potential and encourage the development of gifted behaviors in all students. Talents Unlimited is the foundation for the demonstration lessons they teach, as well as a strategy for differentiating the curriculum to meet the needs of diverse learners. The district has seen a significant increase in the number of minority students participating in their programs for gifted students. Talents remains a major staff development initiative because it is seen as a key to total school improvement."

- Susan Lamar, Coordinator of Gifted Programs; Nash-Rocky Mount Schools; Nashville, NC

"As both a certified trainer for Talents Unlimited and a teacher of gifted children, I have come to treasure Talents not only as a vehicle to stretch my students' abilities to the fullest but as a means for finding those gifted children who do not meet the traditional criteria used to identify children for gifted programs. Minority children or those whose first language is not English are very often under represented in gifted programs because they are not referred for screening. They may feel insecure and hesitant to respond during conventional classroom activities, so teachers are unaware of their true abilities. When Talents lessons become a part of the curriculum, that changes.

At Dover Elementary, a rural school in Florida with a large migrant farm worker population, an ESOL teacher shared an experience with me. She was concerned that a student placed in her classroom because he apparently lacked English skills virtually had no skills at all. The day her class engaged in the first Talents activity, she changed her mind. His response was one of the most creative and unique she had ever seen. She now knew he had abilities she had never thought possible. Once she knew the potential was there, she was able to nurture his gifts and bring them into the open. It was not easy, but each Talents activity brought forth a little more, and soon the student's true ability was recognized.

At Pope John Paul II Elementary School in Paterson, New Jersey similar things are happening. As Talents Unlimited becomes more and more an integral part of the curriculum, many more high ability students are being discovered. Their gifts, which had not always been noticeable in traditional academic activities, are now more quickly and easily recognized.

Teaching Talents benefits all children. It is of particular value for gifted children who are challenged to reach their fullest potential each time a Talents activity is done. Better yet, it is a unique and accurate indicator of high ability in students, especially those who do not display this ability in the usual ways."

- Janet Solomon, GT teacher; Christ the King School; St. Petersburg, FL

"In the state of Kentucky gifted and talent students must be identified and served in five areas: general intellectual, specific academics, creativity, leadership, and fine arts. The services must meet the requirements as described in 704KAR3:285. As a model site, College View Middle School must demonstrate implementation of the services at all grade levels including all underserved populations.

Our entire staff has received Talents Unlimited training as one of the major strategies for identifying and servicing the needs of our student population. Talents activities provide opportunities for higher order thinking skills across the curriculum. Therefore, our teachers are more attuned to behaviors that identify giftedness outside the realm of formal instruments. They are especially recognizing that as minority students build self-confidence, they are able to share their accelerated behaviors in alternative ways. Classroom activities go beyond paper and pencil additional assignments and require the students to apply process thinking skills. Its is not uncommon to see the 'light bulbs' go off as they begin to recognize their uniqueness and ability to communicate, plan, forecast and make accountable decisions at a higher level. This progress helps them to express their knowledge away from formal measures generally used in identification. Many of these formal measures are not accurate for underserved populations.

Talents Unlimited has served as the common strand for students and teachers across all curriculum areas. A common language and recognizable behaviors allow us to all communicate from the same perspective. Math to language arts, science to fine arts - we observe and compare using the Talents Unlimited strategies.

The 'light bulbs' continue to appear in students never before identified!"

- Pam Burns, Program Coordinator; College View Middle School, a state Demonstration Model Site for Gifted and Talented Education; Owensboro, KY

"Based on new insights of giftedness and talent development, the authors of the 1993 National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent encourage identification procedures that seek a variety of diverse talent which are free of bias, utilize multiple and authentic assessments, are flexible, discover talents that are not readily apparent, and assess motivation. The principal value in the nurturance and assessment of Talents Unlimited is in its potential contribution to educational reform."

-Dr. Cindy Sedam, GT Coordinator;
Williamsburg-James City County Schools; Williamsburg, VA

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